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Inclusive teaching for ADHD: Challenges and strategies in mainstream schools

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A B S T R A C T

This study explores the challenges encountered and the strategies employed by elementary teachers to foster inclusive learning environments for students with ADHD. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, data were collected through structured interviews with six purposively selected elementary school teachers from a private institution in Laoag City, Ilocos Norte. Thematic analysis revealed three primary challenges: behavioral disruptions, instructional and pedagogical gaps, and limited institutional support. In response, teachers utilized behavior management interventions, differentiated instructional strategies, and collaborative support mechanisms. These findings suggest that while teachers demonstrate adaptability and commitment, systemic limitations and lack of structured support hinder the full realization of inclusive practices for learners with ADHD. Hence, the study recommends professional development initiatives, provision of assistive teaching resources, and the implementation of comprehensive inclusion policies to enhance the effectiveness of ADHD-inclusive education in mainstream classrooms.

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Introduction

Inclusive education is a globally endorsed framework aimed at ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those with diverse learning needs and disabilities, within mainstream settings. Grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, inclusive education emphasizes scaffolded support, differentiated instruction, and socially interactive learning environments to address the varying abilities of students (Meyer et al., 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). International mandates such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) have further propelled the global commitment toward inclusive practices (UNESCO, 2020). However, despite these policy advancements, practical implementation remains inconsistent, particularly concerning the preparedness of general

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education teachers to support students with specific conditions like Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), who often require individualized and adaptive pedagogical approaches (Sharma et al., 2021).

Students with ADHD present unique challenges in mainstream classrooms due to their characteristic patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, which significantly affect academic engagement and behavioral regulation (Johnson & Lee, 2020). Research underscores the necessity of targeted interventions, such as differentiated instruction, behavioral management strategies, and individualized supports, to facilitate their successful inclusion (Tomlinson, 2017). Nevertheless, many teachers encounter difficulties in meeting the needs of students with ADHD due to limited training, resource constraints, and high student-to-teacher ratios (Forlin et al., 2019). These challenges often lead to academic marginalization, social exclusion, and diminished learning outcomes for students with ADHD, while also contributing to teacher stress, burnout, and attrition (Brown & Roloff, 2021; Florian & Spratt, 2013). Although the literature provides extensive discussions on inclusive education strategies, there is a scarcity of studies that qualitatively examine the lived experiences of teachers as they navigate the complexities of supporting students with ADHD within mainstream educational environments (Smith et al., 2020; Graham et al., 2021).

This study aimed to explore the challenges faced by elementary teachers in mainstream classrooms when supporting students with ADHD and to identify the adaptive strategies they employ to foster inclusive practices. By focusing on teachers' lived experiences, the research seeks to bridge the gap between policy ideals and practical classroom realities. Specifically, the study investigated teachers' pedagogical adaptations, classroom management techniques, collaboration with support professionals, and perceptions of institutional supports. The findings provided valuable insights for educators, administrators, policymakers, and teacher education programs, contributing to the development of more responsive training frameworks, resource allocation strategies, and collaborative models that enhance inclusive education practices for students with ADHD in mainstream settings.

Review of related literature and studies

Challenges faced by teachers in mainstream classes

Teachers in mainstream classrooms face significant challenges in addressing the needs of students with disabilities, particularly due to insufficient training in special education methodologies. Many educators report feeling unprepared to implement inclusive practices, as pre-service teacher education often lacks focused training on differentiated instruction, behavioral management, and specialized instructional strategies (Brown & Roloff, 2021). This gap in training directly affects their ability to create accessible and equitable learning environments for both regular and special needs students. Theoretical frameworks such as Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory (1978) and the Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Framework (Meyer et al., 2014) emphasize the importance of adaptive teaching methods and scaffolding techniques to support diverse learners. However, without structured professional development programs and policy support, teachers often struggle to apply these theories in practice. Recent studies indicate that teachers in resource-constrained environments face even greater difficulties, as they lack access to special education experts, co-teaching opportunities, and assistive technologies, further exacerbating the problem (Sharma & Sokal, 2020).

Another pressing challenge is classroom management, particularly in handling disruptive behaviors among students with special needs. Behavioral difficulties not only impact the student exhibiting them but also affect overall classroom dynamics, making it harder for teachers to maintain engagement and instructional flow (Alvarez et al., 2022). Positive Behavior Support (PBS) strategies, which focus on reinforcing desired behaviors and creating structured interventions, have been shown to reduce classroom disruptions significantly (Sugai & Horner, 2020). However, the implementation of PBS remains inconsistent, as many teachers receive limited training on behavior modification techniques and often rely on traditional punitive measures that may not be effective for neurodivergent students (Kurth & Foley, 2014). Moreover, cultural and policy variations affect how behavioral issues are managed across different educational settings, suggesting a need for context-specific research on effective classroom management strategies in inclusive education.

Lastly, instructional adaptation remains a critical issue, as teachers struggle to modify lessons that balance curriculum requirements with individualized student needs. Differentiated instruction, a widely recommended approach, allows for multiple means of engagement, representation, and assessment, as outlined in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (CAST, 2020). However, recent empirical studies highlight that while differentiated instruction is beneficial, its practical implementation is hindered by large class sizes, insufficient planning time, and a lack of instructional resources (Smith et al., 2020). Additionally, there is limited research on how instructional adaptation strategies work in diverse educational settings, particularly in developing countries where resources are scarce. These gaps underscore the urgent need for further empirical studies on scalable and sustainable inclusive education models, particularly those that consider teacher workload, administrative support, and long-term student learning outcomes.

Strategies for supporting special students in mainstream classrooms

Supporting special needs students in mainstream classrooms requires a multifaceted approach that includes differentiated instruction, Positive Behavior Support (PBS), and collaborative teaching. Differentiated instruction, a strategy grounded in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, allows teachers to modify content, process, and assessments to meet diverse learning needs (Tomlinson, 2019). This approach ensures that students with disabilities receive individualized support while still engaging with the general curriculum. However, practical challenges such as large class sizes, limited planning time, and a lack of

specialized training hinder its effective implementation (Smith et al., 2020). Studies indicate that while differentiated instruction improves student engagement and academic performance, its success depends on teacher competence, administrative support, and access to assistive technologies (Sharma & Sokal, 2020).

Another strategy is Positive Behavior Support (PBS), which focuses on reinforcing appropriate behaviors through structured interventions (Sugai & Horner, 2020). Based on behaviorist principles, PBS aims to create proactive, rather than reactive, classroom management approaches to reduce disruptive behaviors (Allday et al., 2021). However, while research supports its effectiveness, studies reveal inconsistencies in PBS implementation across different school settings due to insufficient teacher training, resistance to non-traditional disciplinary approaches, and a lack of institutional commitment (Kurth & Foley, 2014). Additionally, cultural and contextual differences influence the effectiveness of behavioral interventions, suggesting a need for further comparative research on PBS in diverse educational environments.

Lastly, collaborative teaching, often implemented through co-teaching models, provides an inclusive instructional framework where general and special education teachers work together to support students with disabilities (Friend & Cook, 2020). This model aligns with Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of peer interactions and scaffolding in learning. Empirical studies suggest that co-teaching improves individualized instruction, student engagement, and classroom inclusivity (Murawski & Swanson, 2021). However, challenges such as unclear teacher roles, limited co-planning time, and administrative constraints reduce its effectiveness (Solís et al., 2022). Furthermore, there is a lack of research on the long-term impact of co-teaching on student academic achievement and teacher workload, highlighting the need for further empirical investigation.

Students with Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Students with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) face significant challenges in mainstream education due to persistent patterns of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity (Serrano-Troncoso et al., 2020). Although international frameworks such as the IDEA (2004) and UNCRPD (2006) mandate inclusive education, students with ADHD often encounter barriers including rigid curricula, inadequate teacher training, and social stigma (Pinho et al., 2022). These barriers negatively affect academic achievement, peer relationships, and emotional well-being (Hartman et al., 2022).

Recent approaches such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiated instruction offer promising strategies to support students with ADHD. UDL emphasizes multiple means of engagement and expression to address learner variability (Meyer et al., 2021), while differentiated instruction adapts content and assessment to meet diverse student needs (Poznanski et al., 2021). Additionally, behavioral interventions and assistive technologies have been shown to improve attention, self-regulation, and academic performance (Tourigny et al., 2023; Lam &

Tong, 2022). However, effective implementation remains limited by resource constraints and inconsistent teacher preparedness (Üstün & Özdemir, 2023).

Despite growing research, gaps remain regarding the long-term impact of inclusive education on students with ADHD. Most studies emphasize short-term academic outcomes, neglecting broader aspects such as social integration, resilience, and self-efficacy (Graham et al., 2021). Future research should focus on longitudinal studies and scalable interventions to ensure that inclusive practices genuinely meet the complex needs of students with ADHD in mainstream classrooms.

Mainstream education

Mainstream education refers to the traditional educational system in which students of varying abilities, including those with special needs, are taught together in general education classrooms. This approach is based on the principles of equity and inclusivity, ensuring that all students receive access to quality education regardless of their learning differences (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The shift toward inclusive mainstream education has been reinforced by international policies such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) and the Education for All (EFA) initiative, which emphasize the right of all students to learn in a common educational setting. Research suggests that mainstream education fosters social integration, peer collaboration, and equal opportunities, benefiting both students with and without disabilities (Sharma & Sokal, 2020). However, its successful implementation depends on various factors, including teacher preparedness, school infrastructure, curriculum flexibility, and access to support services (Kurth & Foley, 2014).

One of the critical aspects of mainstream education is the need for effective instructional strategies that accommodate the diverse learning needs of students. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework supports mainstream education by promoting multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression, allowing teachers to differentiate instruction for all students (Meyer et al., 2014). Additionally, collaborative teaching models, such as co-teaching and peer-assisted learning, have been found to enhance the effectiveness of mainstream education, particularly for students with special needs (Friend & Cook, 2020). Despite these advantages, challenges persist, such as inadequate teacher training, large class sizes, and a lack of specialized resources, which can limit the success of inclusive practices in mainstream classrooms (Smith et al., 2020). Furthermore, teachers often struggle with classroom management and behavioral interventions, particularly when working with students who require individualized attention (Alquraini & Gut, 2020).

Although mainstream education has made progress toward inclusivity, significant research gaps remain, particularly regarding long-term academic and social outcomes for students with special needs in mainstream settings (Florian, 2019). Most studies focus on short-term learning achievements, while limited research explores how inclusive mainstream education

impacts students' self-confidence, independence, and future employment opportunities (Solís et al., 2022). Additionally, disparities in policy implementation, funding, and teacher support across different regions create inconsistencies in the quality of mainstream education (Sharma et al., 2021). Future research should examine evidence-based strategies for improving teacher training, developing inclusive curricula, and ensuring sustained support for diverse learners in mainstream educational settings.

Statement of the problem

This study explored the challenges faced and strategies employed by elementary teachers in managing students with ADHD. Specifically, the study answered the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by elementary teachers when managing students with ADHD in inclusive classrooms?
2. What strategies are employed by elementary teachers to address these challenges in inclusive classrooms?

Research methodology

This chapter presents the research design, sources of data which includes the locale of the study, population and sampling, data gathering instrument, data gathering procedure and data analysis including its ethical standards.

Research design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in managing students with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) within inclusive classroom settings. Phenomenology was chosen for its capacity to capture subjective experiences, perceptions, emotions, and adaptive strategies of individuals (Creswell, 2013). By focusing on first-hand accounts, this approach provides deeper insights into the practical and emotional dimensions of inclusive teaching.

Locale of the study

The study was conducted at Our Saviour’s Foundation, Inc., a private educational institution located in Laoag City, Ilocos Norte. The focus was on mainstream elementary classrooms that include students diagnosed with ADHD.

Population and sampling

Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants with direct experience teaching students with ADHD in inclusive classrooms. A total of six elementary school teachers participated in the study. This sample size was deemed sufficient based on the principle of data saturation, wherein data collection is concluded once no new themes or insights emerge. Such a sample range aligns

with qualitative research standards, allowing for rich, in-depth exploration of complex educational experiences (Guest et al., 2006).

Data gathering instrument

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide designed to elicit comprehensive and reflective responses. The interview guide consisted of three major sections: (1) background information (e.g., teaching experience, grade levels taught, prior exposure to learners with special needs); (2) perceived challenges in managing students with ADHD; and (3) strategies implemented to support ADHD learners within the inclusive setting.

Data gathering procedure

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in a private, distraction-free environment to promote openness and authenticity in participants' responses. Each interview lasted approximately 15 to 30 minutes. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and completeness of data. Transcriptions were produced verbatim and reviewed for fidelity to the original responses.

Data analysis tool

Thematic analysis was employed, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: (1) familiarization with data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) identification of themes, (4) review of themes, (5) definition and naming of themes, and (6) report writing. Manual coding was conducted to foster deep engagement with the data. Inter-rater reliability procedures were applied to ensure consistency and credibility in theme development.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. All data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.

Data presentation and analysis

This part presents the findings from structured interviews conducted with elementary teachers at Our Saviour's Foundation, Inc., organized according to key themes identified during interviews.

What are the challenges faced by elementary teachers when managing students with ADHD in inclusive classrooms?

This explores the barriers teachers face when managing, instructing, and assessing students with special needs in mainstream classrooms. The challenges fall into three main themes:

Managing Disruptions (Behavioral and Classroom Management Challenges), Teaching Gaps (Instructional and Pedagogical Challenges), and Limited Support (Assessment and Institutional Challenges). Each theme presents specific difficulties, direct statements from respondents, and interpretations of how these challenges impact inclusive education.

Theme 1: Managing disruptions

This theme focuses on behavioral issues, attention difficulties, and social conflicts that disrupt classroom management and learning flow. Teachers struggle to maintain order, balance attention among students, and foster a positive classroom environment.

One of the most prevalent challenges is handling disruptive behavior, such as sudden emotional outbursts, impulsivity, and difficulties in self-regulation. These behaviors can be distracting for both students and teachers. Participant B shared, *"Managing classroom behavior is an everyday challenge. Some learners with special needs suddenly cry, shout, or walk out of the classroom, making it difficult for others to concentrate."* Similarly, Participant C noted, *"A student with ADHD frequently interrupts lessons, speaks out of turn, and sometimes leaves his seat in the middle of a discussion, which distracts the whole class."* These disruptions interfere with lesson flow and require teachers to constantly redirect attention.

Another major challenge is sustaining student focus and engagement, as learners with special needs often struggle with maintaining attention on tasks. Participant A shared, *"Since they have a short attention span, it is a struggle to keep them engaged for long periods."* Likewise, Participant F explained, *"Some students need constant redirection because they get easily distracted and start playing with objects instead of focusing on the lesson."* This issue affects not only their own learning but also that of their classmates, as teachers must frequently pause lessons to provide individualized support.

Teachers also face difficulties in fostering social interactions between learners with and without special needs. Some students with disabilities experience exclusion or peer conflicts due to misunderstandings. Participant D shared, *"Some students feel irritated when learners with special needs require more attention from me."* Similarly, Partiipant C explained, *"I have seen students with autism struggle to communicate, and their classmates sometimes avoid playing with them because they don't understand their behavior."* These conflicts highlight the need for structured social inclusion strategies.

Teachers face daily struggles in managing disruptions, sustaining engagement, and promoting positive peer interactions. Without proper behavior management strategies, these challenges can lead to classroom stress, reduced learning efficiency, and social isolation for students with special needs. While structured routines and social-emotional learning can help, teachers often lack training and resources to implement these solutions effectively.

Theme 2: Teaching gaps

This theme focuses on the instructional difficulties teachers face in delivering inclusive education, including lesson differentiation, pacing, and balancing instructional needs for both regular students and learners with special needs.

One major challenge is designing differentiated instruction that meets the needs of diverse learners. Many teachers struggle to modify lessons effectively while ensuring that students with disabilities do not feel isolated. Participant B explained, *"Providing lessons that are accessible to both regular learners and those with special needs is difficult."* Similarly, Participant F noted, *"Some students need step-by-step instruction, while others can follow along easily. Adjusting my teaching style to fit both is challenging."* The lack of SPED-specific training exacerbates this issue, making it difficult for teachers to implement best practices in differentiation.

Another instructional challenge is balancing lesson pacing to accommodate students with different learning speeds. Participant A shared, *"If I slow down for my students with special needs, my regular learners get bored."* Likewise, Participant D stated, *"Some students take twice as long to complete an activity, which affects my lesson flow."* These differences create frustration among students and teachers, as some learners struggle to keep up, while others become disengaged due to slower pacing.

Teaching in an inclusive classroom requires flexibility, patience, and creativity. However, teachers often lack proper training and support to implement effective differentiation strategies. The difficulty of balancing lesson pacing means that some students may fall behind, while others may feel unchallenged. To address these challenges, teachers need more professional development opportunities, collaborative planning time, and instructional resources that cater to diverse learning needs.

Theme 3: Limited support

This theme highlights the lack of institutional support, inadequate resources, and grading difficulties that hinder effective inclusive education.

One of the most significant challenges is grading fairly while maintaining academic standards. Teachers often struggle to modify assessments without lowering expectations. Participant A expressed, *"I struggle with ensuring that my grading system remains fair while also considering the unique needs of students with disabilities."* Similarly, Participant C noted, *"Some students require simplified assessments, but I worry about how this affects academic standards."* This difficulty stems from the lack of clear school policies on grading modifications.

Another major barrier is the shortage of classroom resources, teacher aides, and professional training. Many teachers feel underprepared to handle the complexities of inclusive

education. Participant A, B, C and D all stated that they had no formal SPED training, which makes it difficult to apply evidence-based teaching strategies. Additionally, Participant F shared, *"We don't have enough learning materials suited for students with special needs."* The absence of teacher aides further exacerbates these challenges, as teachers must manage behavioral and instructional needs alone. Participant E noted, *"A teacher aide would make a huge difference, but we don't have any in our school."*

The lack of institutional support, training opportunities, and clear policies places a heavy burden on teachers. Grading inconsistencies create concerns about fairness and academic expectations, while the absence of specialized support staff makes it difficult to provide individualized attention. Addressing these issues requires more school-wide initiatives, policy adjustments, and investment in teacher development programs.

What strategies are employed by elementary teachers to address these challenges in inclusive classrooms?

This explores the adaptive strategies teachers employ to address the challenges of inclusive education. These strategies focus on behavioral management, instructional modifications, and external support systems, ensuring that both learners with special needs and regular students receive quality education. This is divided into three themes: Taming Behavior (Behavioral Management Strategies), Adapting Instruction (Differentiated Teaching Strategies), and Seeking Support (Collaborative and Institutional Efforts). Each theme presents specific strategies, direct statements from respondents, and interpretations of how these strategies enhance inclusive education.

Theme 1: Taming behavior

This theme highlights how teachers manage classroom disruptions, maintain order, and create a positive learning environment for students with special needs. Teachers implement structured routines, positive reinforcement, and movement breaks to regulate behavior and promote classroom harmony.

One of the most effective strategies for managing behavior is establishing structured routines and classroom rules. Teachers use predictable schedules, daily reminders, and visual cues to help students feel more secure and prepared. Participant A shared, *"I establish routines before class starts and make sure students are familiar with them."* Similarly, Participant C added, *"We review the class rules every morning so that all students, especially those with special needs, know what to expect."* By maintaining consistent expectations, teachers can prevent anxiety and behavioral disruptions.

Another widely used strategy is positive reinforcement, which involves recognizing and rewarding appropriate behavior to encourage its repetition. Participant E stated, *"I use verbal praise and reward systems like stickers to motivate positive behavior."* Likewise, Participant C mentioned, *"Instead of punishing students, I try to catch them doing something good and acknowledge it."* Positive reinforcement helps students with special needs develop self-confidence and encourages them to engage in learning activities more effectively.

For students who struggle with sitting still for long periods, teachers implement movement breaks and structured transitions to prevent restlessness. Participant F shared, *"I allow short movement breaks between lessons so that students can refocus."* Similarly, Participant A noted, *"We do stretching exercises before transitioning to a new activity."* These strategies help students regulate their energy levels and maintain attention during lessons.

Teachers recognize that behavioral challenges can significantly impact classroom learning, making proactive behavior management essential. Routines and structured environments help learners with special needs feel secure and supported, while positive reinforcement strengthens appropriate behaviors. Additionally, movement breaks and physical activities allow students to release pent-up energy, improving their ability to focus. However, while these strategies are effective, they require teacher consistency and patience, which can be challenging in a large, diverse classroom setting.

Theme 2: Adapting instruction

This theme focuses on how teachers modify lesson delivery, assessments, and instructional approaches to cater to diverse learning needs. By implementing multi-sensory teaching, flexible assessments, and peer-assisted learning, educators ensure that students with special needs can actively participate in lessons.

To accommodate different learning styles, teachers use multi-sensory teaching techniques, incorporating visuals, hands-on activities, and interactive lessons. Participant C explained, *"I use pictures, charts, and videos to help students grasp concepts more easily."* Similarly, Participant E shared, *"For students who struggle with reading, I incorporate audiobooks and interactive storytelling."* These strategies provide alternative ways for students to process information, making learning more engaging and accessible.

Teachers also employ flexible assessments to measure student progress in ways that align with their abilities. Participant F shared, *"Instead of written exams, I allow students to present their answers verbally."* Likewise, Participant B explained, *"I use project-based assessments so that students can demonstrate what they have learned in a way that suits their strengths."* By allowing alternative forms of assessment, teachers provide a more accurate representation of students' learning progress.

Another effective strategy is peer support and buddy systems, which encourage collaboration between learners with and without special needs. Participant E shared, *"I assign buddies so that students with special needs have a peer to assist them during activities."* Additionally, Participant A noted, *"Group work encourages social interaction and teamwork, making sure everyone is included."* These approaches not only help students with special needs academically but also foster social connections and inclusion.

Teachers recognize that traditional teaching methods are not always effective for students with special needs, necessitating the use of multi-sensory strategies to accommodate different learning styles. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic approaches allow students to engage with content in ways that suit their abilities. Additionally, flexible assessments reduce the pressure of standardized testing, ensuring that students are evaluated based on their unique strengths. Peer-assisted learning promotes inclusion by fostering relationships between learners, creating a supportive classroom culture. However, implementing differentiated instruction requires additional planning, which can be time-consuming for teachers who already manage large class sizes.

Theme 3: Seeking support

This theme highlights how teachers seek external support from parents, colleagues, and institutions to enhance inclusive education. Teachers collaborate with families, attend professional training, and advocate for additional resources to improve student learning outcomes.

One of the most effective ways to support students with special needs is collaborating with parents to ensure consistency between home and school environments. Participant D explained, *"I communicate regularly with parents to discuss their child's progress and challenges."* Likewise, Participant F shared, *"Parents provide insights into their child's needs, which helps me adjust my teaching approach."* These partnerships help teachers understand each child's strengths and struggles, allowing for better individualized support.

To enhance their teaching skills, many educators engage in professional training and development. Participant E mentioned, *"I participated in an online course about inclusive education, which helped me a lot."* Similarly, Participant F noted, *"Attending SPED training sessions gave me a better understanding of how to modify my lessons."* Continuous learning allows teachers to implement evidence-based strategies that improve classroom inclusivity.

Teachers also advocate for additional school resources to support inclusive education. Participant F shared, *"We don't have enough learning materials suited for students with special needs."* Likewise, Participant E added, *"A teacher aide would make a huge difference, but we*

don't have any in our school." These statements highlight the urgent need for institutional support, such as teacher assistants, assistive technology, and specialized instructional materials.

Teachers understand that inclusive education requires a collaborative approach. Strong partnerships with parents help reinforce learning strategies at home, ongoing training equips teachers with the skills needed, and institutional support ensures that educators have the necessary tools to implement inclusion effectively. However, the lack of school-provided resources remains a significant barrier, making it challenging for teachers to apply best practices in inclusive education.

Discussion

This study explored the experiences of elementary teachers managing students with ADHD in inclusive classrooms, uncovering three core challenges—managing disruptions, teaching gaps, and limited institutional support—and corresponding strategies including behavior management, instructional adaptation, and collaboration. Teachers consistently reported that behavioral issues like impulsivity, inattention, and peer conflicts disrupted learning, echoing findings by DuPaul and Weyandt (2006) and Mikami and Normand (2015). Social exclusion was also a concern, with teachers striving to foster peer acceptance despite feeling underprepared to support social integration effectively.

Instructionally, participants struggled to differentiate lessons and adjust pacing for diverse learners, highlighting a lack of training in special education and echoing concerns noted by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) and Tomlinson (2017). These challenges were compounded by systemic barriers such as unclear policies, limited assistive resources, and insufficient SPED-trained staff, consistent with broader findings on institutional constraints in inclusive education (Pijl et al., 2017; Lindner & Schwab, 2020). Teachers also reported difficulty in modifying assessments while maintaining academic rigor, reflecting the ongoing tension between equity and standardization.

Despite these limitations, teachers adopted proactive strategies rooted in educational theory. Structured routines and positive reinforcement reflect principles of behaviorist approaches and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Differentiated instruction and multi-sensory teaching are aligned with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which advocates multiple means of engagement and representation (Meyer et al., 2014). Peer-assisted learning and parental collaboration support Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, emphasizing the influence of microsystem relationships on student development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The study affirms and extends the applicability of UDL and Bronfenbrenner's theory in inclusive classrooms for ADHD learners. It demonstrates that inclusive pedagogy is not only a matter of instructional design but also of social systems and institutional support. The findings suggest a

need to refine existing theoretical models to incorporate the realities of resource-limited school environments, particularly in developing countries.

On a practical level, this study reveals the importance of sustained professional development programs focused on ADHD-specific strategies, institutional investment in classroom aides and assistive technology, and the development of clearer policies for inclusive grading. School administrators and policymakers should prioritize resources that enable teachers to implement inclusive practices effectively. Further, teacher education curricula must embed inclusive strategies from the outset to equip future educators for diverse classrooms.

Conclusion

This study examined the lived experiences of elementary teachers managing students with ADHD in inclusive classrooms and revealed key challenges including behavioral disruptions, instructional gaps, and limited institutional support. In response, teachers adopted adaptive strategies such as structured routines, positive reinforcement, differentiated instruction, and collaboration with parents and colleagues. The findings underscore that inclusive education for students with ADHD demands both individual teacher initiative and comprehensive systemic backing. Theoretically, the study contributes to extending Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory into the context of ADHD-inclusive education, particularly in resource-constrained environments. Practically, it emphasizes the need for targeted professional development, the deployment of SPED-trained personnel, provision of assistive technologies, and clearly defined inclusive policies. Future research should explore longitudinal outcomes of ADHD-inclusive practices and identify scalable models suitable for varied educational contexts.

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